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## Nanotechnology: Congress Thinks Big About Small Tech

By [Roy Mark](#)

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Nanotechnology experts told Congress Wednesday that pending legislation in the House and the Senate is a "significant step" in overcoming the current obstacles facing the fledgling industry. Bills in both houses would dedicate more than \$2 billion over three years for nanotechnology research and development programs.

[S. 189](#), sponsored by Sen. Ron Wyden (D.-Ore.) and [H.R. 766](#), introduced by House Science Committee Chairman Sherwood Boehlert (R.-N.Y.) and Rep. Mike Honda (D.-Calif.), would support nanotechnology programs at the National Science Foundation, the Department of Energy, the Department of Commerce, NASA, and the Environmental Protection Agency.

The House legislation is expected to be reported to the House floor as early as next month while Senate Commerce Committee Chairman John McCain (R.-Ariz.) has put the legislation on the fast track.

The legislation has been endorsed by several leading science, technology and business organizations, including the National Association of Manufacturers, the Semiconductor Industry Association, the Nanobusiness Alliance and the Alliance for Science & Technology Research in America.

On Wednesday, the House Science Committee heard testimony from Dr. Thomas Theis, director of physical sciences, IBM Research Division at the Thomas J. Watson Research Center; Dr. James Roberto, associate director for physical sciences at Oak Ridge National Laboratory; Dr. Carl Batt, co-director of the Cornell University Nanobiotechnology Center; and Alan Marty, executive-in-residence at JP Morgan Partners.

"Nanotechnology is a subject on which there is already broad agreement -- on this dais, at the witness table, and indeed in the Congress and country at large. We all understand that nanotechnology can be a key to future economic prosperity and might improve our lives and that the federal government needs to play a role in making that so," said Boehlert, who stated his plan to report the bill out of the Science Committee by late April or early May and move swiftly to consideration on the House floor.



Richard Russell, associate director for technology at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy told the panel, "The Administration shares this Committee's belief in the importance of federal support for nanotechnology R&D and coordination of the research efforts that are funded."

Russell noted that Administration's differences with H.R. 766 "are minor" and was optimistic that they could be worked out.

"The nanotechnology industry could become one of the new engines of our economy," said Rep. Honda. "It is important that the United States lead the world in the development of the nanotechnology industry, and it will take many years of sustained federal investment in research and development to achieve this goal. It is clear that nanotechnology applications will have a dramatic impact on society, and we set up structures to assess and understand the technical, social, ethical, philosophical, and legal issues that will arise."

While specific figures are difficult to calculate, JP Morgan's Marty testified that an estimated \$500 million was invested in nanotechnology start-ups in 2002, and noted, "NSF conservatively predicts a \$1 trillion global market for nanotechnology in little over a decade."

Marty said that a large gap exists between the laboratory and the marketplace and that federal funding in this area has typically been lacking.

"Except for the (Advanced Technology Program), no government programs properly address this vital timeframe in the cycle of research and business," Marty said. "This time period is one that competing nations in Asia and the EU are particularly attuned to addressing and are providing a life line to many U.S. start-ups, which sends growth and profits abroad,"

He estimated that in Fiscal Year 03 Japan invested \$1 billion in nanotechnology commercialization and the EU invested more than \$1 billion.

Witnesses agreed that there are societal and ethical concerns with nanotechnology that everyone must be aware of, but said those concerns have been exaggerated in fiction and in the media.

"History shows that most of the dangers to society that result from the misuse of technology arise not from state-of-the-art technology, but more mundane technology in the hands of opportunists," Cornell's Batt said.

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